



# Gardener's World Heritage

*Temperate House, Kew*

Both casual plant-lovers and scientists rely on the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Flushed with the success of the Garden's recent World Heritage award, Kew director **Peter Crane** discusses the competing constituencies which look to Kew for inspiration - and reveals that he has no intention of resting on his *lauris nobilis*.

Located in 132 hectares of landscaped gardens, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew has long been one of the world's leading botanical gardens and a well-known visitor attraction. This summer its prestige was further enhanced by the decision of UNESCO to inscribe Kew, together with 23 other sites from around the world, on the list of World Heritage Sites. For those of us working at Kew, securing World Heritage Site status is hugely exciting. It is a stamp of approval that puts us in the company of the

best of the best, which in turn brings increased public awareness. But even more importantly it embodies a public commitment to maintain an organisation that is truly special and world class.

Each year more than a million visitors explore the beauty of Kew's landscape and enjoy the tranquillity of the gardens. But as the World Heritage Site inscription emphasises, Kew is more than just a public garden. It is, at the same time, an active and internationally renowned scientific organisation undertaking research into the diversity of plants on this planet; an educational organisation concerned with increasing understanding and appreciation of plants and the importance of conservation; a collection of buildings and a landscape of great historic and artistic significance; and an organisation that has had a lasting economic impact around the world through its association with Empire. If that weren't





*Inside the Temperate House, Kew*

enough, the cumulative impact of Kew's scientific and horticultural expertise has had a sustained and lasting impact on development of ideas in plant science and evolution. It has also played a significant role in the development of a global movement for conservation of the world's plants.

Nevertheless, despite these many strengths and a long list of remarkable achievements, the prospects for Kew's future are even more exciting. Its mission, to enable better management of the earth's resources, has never been more relevant. And as the world leader in the science of plant diversity Kew has much to contribute. The question now is how to deliver more for the cause of plant conservation and sustainability, while at the same time further strengthening Kew's science, maintaining our profile as a visitor attraction and ensuring that the site is preserved and restored in the best possible way?



As usual, the trick will be to get the right balance.

Another issue that needs attention is building enhanced public awareness of the true richness that is Kew. In scientific circles, Kew is already internationally respected for its outstanding living collection of plants, world-class herbarium and important scientific facilities, as well as its scientific expertise in plant diversity, conservation and

sustainable development – both in the UK and overseas. Kew's living and preserved plant collections, and their associated materials, are the largest and most diverse anywhere in the world. The library, the archives, the collections of botanical art and the photographic collections are similarly world class. But very little of this is clear to our current visitors and the existence of these resources is not as widely known outside the scientific community as it should be. Therefore, a further key element of our future strategy must be to make these



*Pagoda, Kew*

collections more accessible and more useful to the diverse publics that we serve.

We also have much to do in terms of engaging with the public about all manner of issues relating to the history, status, use and future of plant diversity. As an educational organisation, a key part of Kew's work is to increase public understanding and appreciation of plant diversity, conservation and sustainability. We already do this in many different ways. More than 122,000 children visit the gardens free every year and through our educational programmes we provide a variety of study days and activities, as well as teacher training. Similarly, we are working hard to upgrade our interpretation, and we already provide a variety of courses, lectures, guided tours and other activities that are heavily attended throughout the year. But again, there is so much more to do. For example, many



species in the living collection are endangered, or even extinct, in their natural habitats but so far we fail to bring this to the attention of our visitors. In this, and many other ways, Kew is increasingly involved in plant conservation – both in the UK and overseas, but so far this does not come across as clearly as it must.

Communication about the importance of Kew's landscape and buildings is also a key area for the future. The World Heritage Site nomination recognises Kew as a "unique cultural landscape" and as

having played an important role in landscape and garden history. With over 40 listed buildings and other structures on site and two ancient monuments, Kew provides a fascinating insight into the development of architecture and garden buildings over the last 200 years. Kew Palace and Queen Charlotte's Cottage reflect Kew's strong link with royalty and



the historic landscape shows the hand of leading designers including Capability Brown, Chambers and Nesfield. There are also iconic buildings from both the Georgian and the Victorian eras. Conserving, restoring and enhancing this heritage is one crucial concern, but communicating the intrinsic importance and interest of the site to our visitors is also an area that needs more thought as well as further investment.

Becoming a World Heritage Site recognises Kew's important history and outstanding universal value, as well as the work and achievements of past and current generations of scientists and horticulturists. But it also gives added impetus to thinking about Kew's future. The process of securing the World Heritage Site inscription, especially through the development of the Management Plan, has helped us envisage the next stage in Kew's evolution.



Through this process we have reaffirmed our commitment to conserve the site, improve access for visitors, do an even better job in education. We will also strengthen further our contribution to science and plant conservation. In this way, our hope is that World Heritage status will not only raise the profile of Kew as a beautiful visitor destination, but also help increase understanding of the full richness of Kew, and why its work is important for the future of plants and the planet.

All images appear courtesy of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



## UK Garden Visitor Attractions

- 1 There were 11.7 million visits to garden attractions in 2001
- 2 19 per cent of Garden attractions are in urban areas
- 3 52 per cent of Gardens are privately owned
- 4 36 per cent of all garden visitor attractions had to close due to Foot & Mouth in 2001
- 5 Garden attractions reported an overall increase of 4 per cent in gross revenue from 2000 to 2001
- 6 Over £8.8 million was spent on investment in garden attractions in 2001
- 7 Garden attractions account for 4 per cent of all employment in the UK
- 8 Garden attractions account for 6 per cent of all visitor attractions in the UK
- 9 Sheffield's Winter Garden is one of the largest temperate glasshouses built in the last hundred years. It is the biggest glasshouse in any European city centre and is large enough to accommodate 5,000 domestic greenhouses.
- 10 11 per cent of those visiting gardens are overseas visitors

- 11 The average dwell time for visiting garden attractions is 137 minutes
- 12 Over 6 million people paid to visit gardens in the UK in 2001
- 13 The oldest botanical garden in England can be found in Oxford, and was created in 1621
- 14 Knot gardens became popular during the renaissance. The name 'knot' derives from the carpet knots on which their patterns were based.
- 15 Rose gardens are thought to have become popular after the collection of roses formed by Napoleon's wife, Josephiné, at Malmaison near Paris.
- 16 In the eighteenth century, botanical gardens provided educational entertainment for kings and princes. In the nineteenth century public authorities began making public botanical gardens as a means of providing knowledge for the poor.
- 17 The great age for English gardens was the early twentieth century Arts and Crafts period
- 18 The Lost Gardens of Heligan, Pentewan, St. Austell were recently voted "The Nation's Favourite Garden" by Television viewers
- 19 The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew have the tallest specimens of 138 types of tree
- 20 The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew are the most visited paid-entry gardens

